

Reuben R. Bunker House
Academy Hill
Nantucket
Nantucket County
Massachusetts

HABS No. MASS-916

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

REUBEN R. BUNKER HOUSE

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Location: Academy Hill (last house on south side of Church Avenue on Academy Hill, formerly Beacon Hill), Nantucket, Massachusetts.

Present Owner: Margaret B. Dell (Mrs. Burnham N. Dell)

Present Occupant: Mrs. Dell

Present Use: Residence

Brief Statement of Significance: Example of the turn of the eighteenth century home of a prominent Nantucketer with later Federal details.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners:

- 1806 -- Reuben R. Bunker purchased land from Latham Gardner and from heirs of Estate of Caleb Macy, and erected house shortly thereafter. Reuben Bunker died 1856.
- 1859 -- Charles Bunker, his son, bought house from other heirs.
- 1859 -- Bunker deeded it to his daughter Sarah Bunker.
- 1887 -- Susan H. Palmer bought property.
- 1891 -- Madeline C. Mixter bought from Oliver H. Palmer, son of Susan H. Palmer.
- 1915 -- Helen K. Appleton inherited property from Madeline Mixter.
- 1919 -- Burnham N. Dell bought Reuben R. Bunker house and a portion of the land from Helen K. Appleton.
- 1959 -- Burnham N. Dell and Margaret B. Dell, joint ownership.
- 1963 -- to date -- Margaret B. Dell.

(Abstract, Records Registry Deeds, Nantucket, Mass.)

2. Date of erection: Generally believed to be soon after the Revolution; probably 1806 when Reuben R. Bunker bought the land. The claim that house was built in 1790 has not been substantiated.
3. Architect: Not known.
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: House is roomier than most houses of its period, and is of the typical plan with rooms clustered around the central chimney with six fireplaces.

The living room is paneled with a deep cornice. There is an interesting fireplace with curved sides in the bedroom behind the first floor parlor. The newel post in the front hall is reeded on only two sides and the reeding carried down the stair riser to the floor. Exposed corner-post construction was still used when this house was built, but a casing conceals the rough timber. The casing has a beaded edge.

There is a walk on the roof as on so many Nantucket houses of this period.

5. Notes on alterations and additions: The corners of the house have been embellished with wooden quoins and the entrance has a simple fanlight over the door with a classical front porch in the Federal style, which was added about 1820. The porch is a distinctive architectural feature and drawings of it are on file in the records of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities.

The front hall has been widened to include a window, while in the upper hall two closets were removed to enlarge the hall. The fireplace opening in the chamber over the parlor has been made smaller and a molded mantel used around the opening. (Abstract, Old Houses on Nantucket by Duprey)

Originally one large room, the kitchen has been remodelled by the Dells and is now three rooms -- kitchen, pantry and laundry.

The house is situated on a hill-top, facing north with a view of the ocean.

- B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure: Academy Hill was the site of the "Academy", a private school built in 1800. Up to 1827 nothing but private schools were conducted on the Island, with "cent" schools for the primary classes.

This house is known as the Bunker House, as it was built by Reuben R. Bunker, a whaling captain. Bunker was an important man in the Town and his signature appears on many records, petitions, etc.

Some time prior to 1812 Reuben Bunker captained the Ship Brutus which went with William Rotch and forty American ships to conduct whale fishery for France and to settle at Dunkirk.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old Views: Photograph of house, Early Dwellings of Nantucket, White Pine Series, Vol. III, No. 6, 1917; doorway detail, A Mirror of Nantucket by George Allen Fowlkes; exterior and many interior views, Old Houses on Nantucket by Kenneth Duprey; side view of house and one of doorway, Nantucket: A Camera Impression by Samuel Chamberlain, New York: Hastings House, 1939; view of side of house, Ninety-Five Percent Perfect by Everett U. Croaby, Tetakimmo Press, 1953; drawings of porch in records of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities.

2. Bibliography:

Duprey, Kenneth. Old Houses on Nantucket. New York: Architectural Book Publishing Co., Inc., 1959.

Fowlkes, George Allen. A Mirror of Nantucket: An Architectural History of the Island, 1686-1850. New Jersey: Press of Interstate, 1959.

Prepared by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin
Nantucket, Massachusetts
June, 1966

PART II. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared for the Historic American Buildings Survey project on Nantucket, Massachusetts. They are part of a continuing HABS comprehensive survey of the early architecture and urban design of Nantucket financed by a grant from the Nantucket Historical Trust.

The project was under the general supervision of James C. Massey, Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey. Historical information was provided by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin of Nantucket, Massachusetts. Photographs are by Jack E. Boucher of Linwood, New Jersey. The material was edited for deposit in the Library of Congress by Mrs. Constance Werner Ramirez, August 1971.